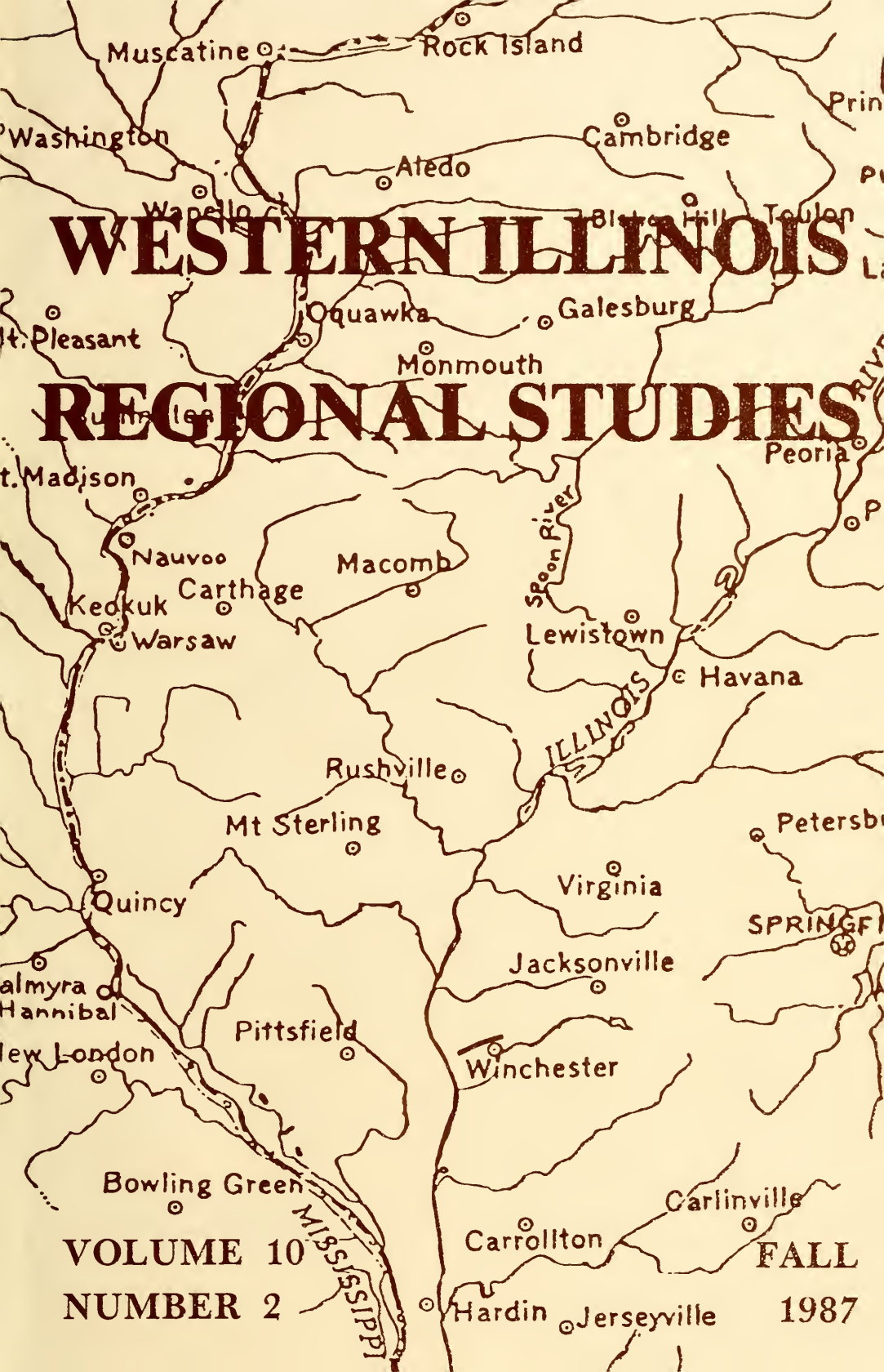

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VOLUME 10 NUMBER 2 FALL 1987

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WESTERN ILLINOIS REGIONAL STUDIES

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

The three articles in this issue of *Western Illinois Regional Studies* are noteworthy contributions to the study of art and architecture in our region. Only one of them (devoted to the Rock Island Arsenal) was written by a professional art historian; the other two were prepared by a university librarian with some archival background and a high school art teacher and graduate student who became interested in the architectural heritage of her hometown of Beardstown, Illinois. The articles are ample testimony to the quality and vitality of the visual arts in the Western Illinois region during the nineteenth century and to the dedicated professionals and amateurs who study it and whose efforts will perhaps encourage others in similar directions.

At one level, these articles are the written counterpart to those projects of historic restoration and preservation which take place in many regional communities. While modern communications and mass culture have certainly changed and even eroded the patterns of rural and small-town life, regional historical studies, restoration projects, and even local festivals and their accompanying crafts help to preserve a link to the past, when local artistic traditions of many different kinds flourished and were an integral part of the regional scene. As we reflect on the tremendous impact and inevitability of these changes, it is reassuring to see both active as well as scholarly interest in preserving our past through the study and preservation of monuments. I'd like to think that the articles by Titus Karlowicz, Dean Howd, and Sarah Jane Sargent might serve as models for other studies of regional monuments and practicing artists — studies which combine sound visual analysis, investigation of primary and secondary source material, a broad understanding of the history of American art, and a sense of the human context in which the arts function.

In our own time, the arts depend upon sources other than the regional economy for support. Through a variety of programs and grants, state and even national agencies like the Illinois Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts provide opportunities for artists and regional support groups to improve the quality of their arts. An important role is also played by colleges and universities, whose unique resources make them cultural centers serving the needs of an entire region as well as a student population. To cite but one example, the Art Department at Western Illinois University sponsors a series of exhibitions, workshops, and related lectures at its Gallery during each academic year. Those events focus on such diverse subjects as the art of basketry, an exemplary collection of decorative duck carving, international prints and the works of

mainstream Modernist sculptor Seymour Lipton. The variety of shows is meant to embrace rather than exclude the university, town, and regional communities. Through the other departments in the College of Fine Arts, the performing arts also contribute substantially to the fabric of regional life: both concerts and year-round theatre productions may now be heard in the recently constructed Hainline Theatre, funded jointly by private bequest and additional state monies. One should also mention in this context the College of Fine Arts Development Office, whose staff assists individuals and groups in sponsoring arts-related projects and programs. Perhaps its most significant contribution in recent years was the creation of the Two Rivers Arts Council, which serves a fourteen-county region. TRAC is now virtually self-supporting, and administers a number of programs including four volumes of oral history *(Tales from Two Rivers),* the Shad Hill (Farmington) Arts and Cultural Center, and an "Expansion Arts Grant" from the Illinois Arts Council.

In the interview included as the final article in this issue, the importance of regional arts and the challenge of funding them are among the topics discussed by art collector and advocate George Irwin of Quincy, Illinois, who has devoted considerable energy over the last fifty years to developing support for the arts. In the long run, it is the determination of leaders like Irwin, as well as the talent of regional artists, that makes it possible for the arts to enrich the culture of western Illinois.

David Raizman

THE HISTORIC ARCHITECTURE OF ROCK ISLAND ARSENAL[1]

Titus M. Karlowicz

Anyone who finds enjoyment in identifying or puzzling over historic architectural styles will find an abundance of examples while travelling about in western Illinois. Smaller towns and rural areas display this wealth of the past as do the larger cities of Galesburg, Jacksonville, Moline, Peoria, Rock Island and Quincy. Although demolition, alteration and "modernization" have diminished the number of individual quality buildings and changed the general historic character of some areas, there does remain a substantial amount of what is called "historic fabric."

A man-made environment which retains its historic character by the appearance of its buildings and amenities provides a sense of what the setting may have been like during the time when growth and development were taking place. Some good examples are found in residential areas of the cities mentioned already. At Warsaw and Bishop Hill virtually the entire townscapes retain their historic ambience. Moreover, architecture in the larger sense, which includes planning in a context of landscape and urban development, is also evident in the several remaining courthouse squares and in residential districts of Quincy.

An especially fine and unique example of large scale planning indicative of sound architectural thinking of the nineteenth century is found at the Rock Island Arsenal, where an industrial complex and a residential area form an integrated historic district. At the arsenal the matter of style narrows considerably since unified stylistic characteristics add to the distinguishability and unity of each respective area. Happily, it remains in a rather good state of preservation, so the visitor can readily perceive a sense of historic time and place.

Habitation or use of this island in the Mississippi River where the river runs east and west at the Quad Cities of Bettendorf, Davenport, Moline and Rock Island, antedates the explorations of the French. The story to be considered here, however, dates back only to about the time of the Civil War when the construction of an arsenal was begun in 1863 under the command of Major C. P. Kingsbury. Credit for the concept of the arsenal complex to be discussed here, however, is generally given to his successor, General Thomas J. Rodman, who took command in August of 1865. Its development continued after his death in 1871 into the 1890's. His successors, Captain D. W. Flagler, Colonel J. G. Baylor, and Colonel J. M. Whittemore, followed the established course of planned development.

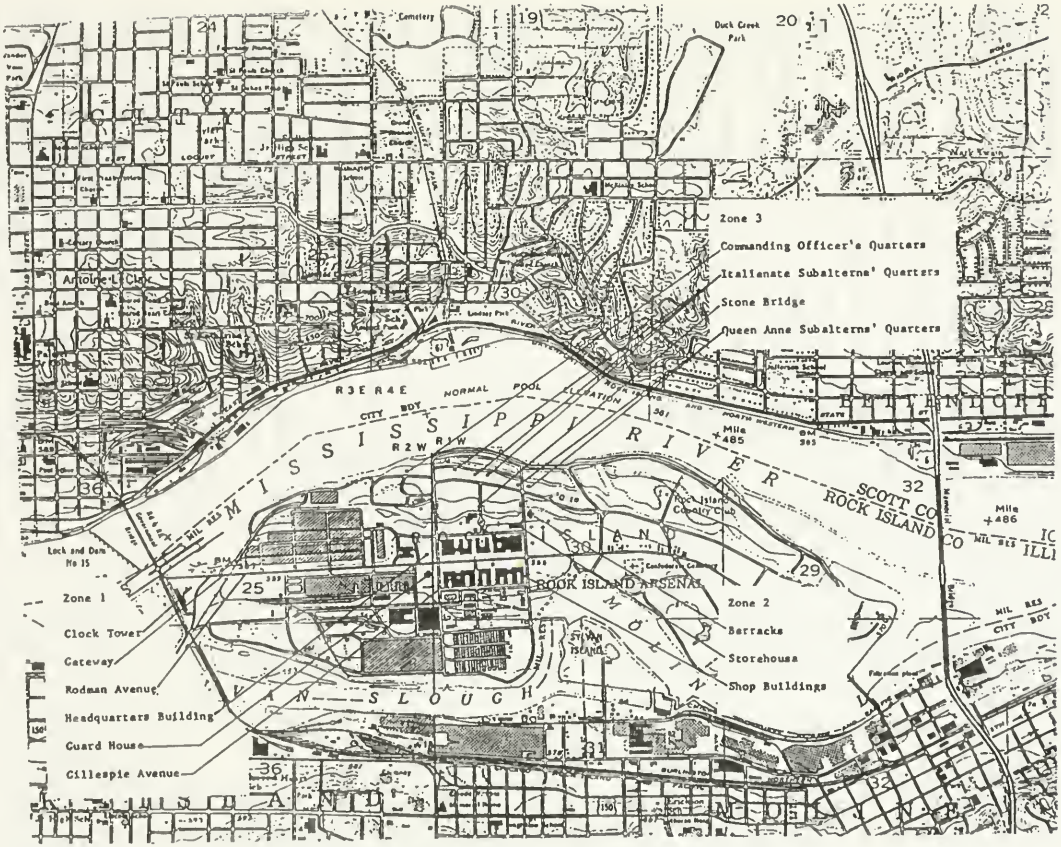
While some of the ancillary buildings were not built, the architectural program can be considered virtually complete.

It was the loss of the armory at Harper's Ferry to Confederate troops in April 1861 which generated a movement to develop a system of arsenals. Politicking at the national level went on for a year before any Congressional action came forth. In July 1862, an Act was passed for the establishment of certain national arsenals and provided funds for "three arsenals of deposit and repair" located at Columbus, Ohio, Indianapolis, Indiana and Rock Island, Illinois. Later, in April 1864, an Act of Congress designated the arsenal at Rock Island to be one of "construction, deposit and repair." Adding the function of construction altered the basic premise significantly to include armament manufacturing not provided in the earlier legislation. Rather than something of a depot, the facility at Rock Island was to be genuinely an arsenal.

The development which had begun in 1863 under Major Kingsbury at the west end of the island with construction of what is now the Clock Tower Building was altered radically with the new legislation. Moreover, Rodman's replacement of Kingsbury, who had asked to be relieved of his command at Rock Island, is far from incidental. The new legislation and elevation in rank of the command indicate that a change was contemplated for the Rock Island site. There is little doubt that throughout the politicking and development of legislation there was also a desire for a Grand Design which would give the arsenal its appropriate symbolic value of strength.

Extensive research has not yielded any direct evidence of a clearly spelled out plan or any pre-construction layout of the grounds. There is enough inferential evidence, however, which allows us to conclude that Rodman and his superior, Chief of Ordnance General A. B. Dyer, had lengthy conferences dealing with the subject of the "Grand Arsenal." Shortly after Rodman's death, the Chief of Ordnance visited the arsenal site and conferred with Captain Flagler, presumably with the purpose of laying out the ideas which had begun to come to fruition under Rodman's command. We cannot infer, however, that either Rodman or Dyer were the designers or in some sense the architects of the arsenal, but it was under their leadership that the course was set for adherence to an integrated program of design and construction through several changes in the chief administrative personnel at the arsenal.

During the nineteenth century federal construction projects were executed in the offices of a government architect in the employ of the Treasury Department. Additional research may reveal who the professional architect or architects may have been, but there is little doubt that this person was well versed in current architectural thinking and skilled in the application of its vocabulary. At the time that the project was undertaken and when the elaboration of the architectural program took place, Thomas Ustick Walter, creator of the dome over the national capitol, was the government architect. It would be entirely appropriate to



Detail of Rock Island from U.S. Geodetic Survey.

attribute the above qualifications to him and to speculate that he may have been the architect, or that the concept was his and the design developed by subordinates under his supervision.[2]

The building which initiated the development of the arsenal in 1863, before Rodman's arrival, is now the landmark Clock Tower, built in the Greek Revival style (see map). It appears that originally this was to have been the nucleus of the facility which would have occupied the west end of the island. After Rodman took command, it was determined that the arsenal complex should be relocated toward the center of the island on higher ground. Water power necessary for the expanded role of the arsenal and other new needs seem to have been considerations in the decision to abandon the original site. The already extant Clock Tower was not disregarded as the change was made. Rather, it provided a focal point for an entry into the greater complex. Its style was consistent with those arsenal buildings which were to follow though they would be situated three-quarters of a mile to the east. A boulevard-like greenway leads to the arsenal proper. Its gradual upward slope enhances the suggestion of a grand entry and in concept is reminiscent of a thoroughfare like the Champs Elysees in Paris, which leads in a similar manner from the Louvre to the Arch of Triumph. On entering the greenway (Rodman Avenue) through a gateway, one senses readily its kinship to that major urban planning project of the nineteenth century undertaken in Europe.

Recent construction has made intrusions upon the original formality of the boulevard. Enough of the open greenway remains, however, to indicate the ceremonial character of the approach to the new site. Upon arriving at the arsenal compound proper, one notes that the adverse effect of the intrusions is diminished. At the west side of the intersection of Rodman Avenue and Gillespie Avenue are the former guard house on the south side and a headquarters building opposite on the north side of the avenue (figs. 1 and 2).[3] These serve as an introduction to the imposing Greek Revival shop buildings which loom large in comparison; there are ten of them, lined up five on either side of the continuation of Rodman Avenue, which suggests something like military squads on dress parade with the buildings symmetrically aligned and facing each other. The formal austerity one might expect is relieved by having some of these interconnected so it appears that there are a pair of large structures flanking a smaller one on either side of the avenue. The open space of the boulevard, though now invaded by automobile parking, remains. An artist's rendition of a bird's-eye view dated from 1891 shows that the avenue through the arsenal complex was lined with trees on broad lawns to provide relief from the imposing formality of the buildings (fig. 3).[4]

Although it may appear that there are three large shop buildings on either side of Rodman Avenue, there are indeed five. Four are virtually identical in design, and all were originally large U-shaped forms in ground plan with courts opening away from Rodman Avenue. The U was formed by a unit equal in height to the rest of the building with the plane of its facade

facing Rodman Avenue brought near the planes of the two terminal pavilions which are the short facades of the long wings framing the court (figs. 5 and 6). In order to relieve the repetitiousness of ten identical facades, two variations were introduced. First, four of the U-shaped forms were interconnected by units which were recessed deeper than those forming the U, thereby creating the impression that the arrangement consisted of three buildings on either side of Rodman Avenue rather than five (fig. 7). Secondly, the buildings in the center of each row were varied in their design from the others by the proportions of height to breadth. In addition, the fenestration was used to indicate a single story space on the interior and was given a modicum of greater depth to provide a greater sense of relief than that found in the other shop buildings (fig. 8).

The so-called Greek Revival style is radically simplified in these buildings, but is keynoted by several features; namely, the slopes of the gables are suggestive of Greek Classical pediments and the pilasters are allusions to the Doric order. A notable departure from this style, which prevailed in the United States between 1820 and 1860, is the use of the rough-faced stone. The typical Greek Revival was characterized by a smoothly dressed stone in masonry structure. Nevertheless, the effect is quite powerful and a convincing expression of strength with reference to a classical sense of unity.[5]

In contrast to the formal symmetry of the shop complex is a residential area devoted to officers quarters. The two areas are separated by a large open space bisected by a walkway featuring a fine stone bridge (fig. 9). This and the disposition of the six houses combine into a picturesque setting with the houses overlooking the Mississippi River from a terraced level. Although the houses are situated at comfortable distances from one another generally from west to east, the arrangement is irregular and informal. The commanding officer's quarters and three subaltern officers' quarters comprise a discrete set of four buildings in the Italianate style which were built between 1870 and 1874. To the east are two later subaltern officers' quarters featuring distinct variants of Queen Anne style which were built in 1902 and 1905.[6]

The Commanding Officer's Quarters (which Rodman did not have the pleasure of occupying, by the way) represents one of the finest and more elegant Mid-western examples of many in the Italian Villa. Again, the generous landscape treatment endowed the building with freedom from encroachment by other construction and enhanced its symbolic prominence as the residence of the installation's highest ranking officer. It is very much like a piece of sculpture which requires circumambulation, for each side is different from the other (figs. 10, 11 and 12). The exterior is finely crafted with use of smooth-faced stone over the walls, and moderately textured projecting quoins at the corners. Masonry surrounds for the fenestration are sensitively proportioned as are the brackets under the eaves. Adding to the elegance as well as to the overall romantic flavor are the verandas, some having screens and fine ironwork at the entry (fig. 13).

The building's prominence, due to its size and elaborateness, gives it visual command of the setting to serve as keynote to the role the residential area is assigned in contrast to the industrial one.

In contrast, the subalterns' quarters are considerably more modest. These are located along a gently undulant roadway facing across a terrace sloping toward the river. The first is found approximately 300 yards down the roadway to the east of the Commanding Officer's Quarters (fig. 14). The texture of the masonry is more or less uniformly somewhat coarse except for the sills and heads of windows. Bracketing under the eaves typical of the Italianate style is absent. The broad veranda across the entire front of the house diminishes the cube-like proportions, and its ornamental ironwork adds a touch of enrichment.

Approximately 100 yards to the east is the second of the subalterns' quarters and its massing is comparable to that of the first. There is some contrast between the fine texture of the masonry wall and the quoins at the corners, and the window treatment is also comparable. The front of the house is moderately irregular by the fact that projection of the central pavilion is deeper on one side than on the other (fig. 15). On the veranda this results in depth of two bays on one side and only one on the other. The ironwork on the veranda is a variant of that on the previous subaltern's house, but the distinguishing feature of this house is the presence of Italianate brackets under the eaves.

The next of the three subalterns' houses is much different from the previous two. While it does have the Italianate bracketing and similar masonry materials, it distinguishes itself from the others by the comparative irregularity of its form. Though two-storied, as are the others, the principal facade (front) is much more asymmetrical in composition. A unit with veranda, which is not screened and is devoid of ironwork, constitutes approximately half of the composition. The other half, to the right, is made up of a deep niche running through the entire elevation and a terminal unit at the end which comes back to the plane of the wall of the other half (fig. 16).

The three general zones (the boulevard approach, the industrial complex, the open space buffer and the residential area) comprise an excellent example of nineteenth-century planning thought. Together they comprise an integrated plan with contrasting disparate parts. Having adopted the concept of the picturesque for the residential zone, and combining that with an appropriate difference in architectural styles heightens the contrast and goes beyond being merely a matter of formality versus informality. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, the juxtaposition of the virtually unrelieved uniformity of the Greek Revival industrial complex, with comparative freedom of the residential zone resulted in an especially successful expression of work (labor or business) versus respite therefrom. There is, in addition to an articulate demonstration of the architectural vocabulary of the time, a thorough understanding of planning which takes into account the landscape and adapting its features to create an

environment suitable to the purposes a design is supposed to serve. In America, Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. was the leader of the movement to integrate consideration of the landscape into the planning of the man-made environment. Rock Island Arsenal was conceived less than a decade after Olmsted came into prominence with his collaborative design with Calvert Vaux for Central Park in New York City.

Rock Island Arsenal retains qualities which make it a truly historic place, architecturally speaking. There is probably enough material for a separate article on its role in the history of armament. For the visitor, it offers readily that sense of time and place which existed during the period of its development, for it is remarkably intact.

NOTES

[1]This article is a digest of "The Architectural Inventory" found in *Cultural Resources Inventory and Evaluation of Rock Island Arsenal, Rock Island, Illinois,* by Henry B. Moy and Titus M. Karlowicz, Normal, Illinois, 1981. The portion of that work by the author of this article was based largely on archival materials in the U. S. Army Armament Material Readiness Command (AARCOM) Historical Office and on site study and photo documentation of the historic architectural features of the arsenal. Copies of the above mentioned work are available at the AARCOM Historical Office at the Arsenal, the Western Illinois University Library Archive, and the Midwestern Archeological Research Center at Illinois State University. The inventory and evaluation were done under the auspices of the latter, and funded by a grant from the U.S. Army.

[2]Walter retired from government service due to ill health in 1865. That he was expert in the application of the styles used at Rock Island Arsenal is evidenced in his earlier design in the Greek Revival style of Founder's Hall at Girard College in Philadelphia (1833-47). Additional evidence of his knowledge of styles is his co-authorship of *Two Hundred Designs for Cottages and Villas* (1846) with J. Jay Smith.

[3]Designations and uses for the buildings have changed with time. Those used here are derived from the original.

[4]The bird's-eye view shows to the left a row of storehouses behind the shop buildings. Only one of these was built at the north east end of the complex (fig. 4).

[5]That this expression of strength and unity had its symbolic value should not be underestimated. The esthetic application of the kind of unity found in the shop buildings is certainly appropriate just for the sake of orderliness and a show of organization. However, the insistent show of strength and unity also offers the reminder that the Civil War was, after all, a conflict over whether of not the union of the nation was to be perpetuated. The career military personnel of the Union forces were not only dedicated to the principle that it would, but we must be reminded that beyond the principle was the troublesome fact that those who had been colleagues and classmates during their military training found themselves at war with one another. At Rock Island especially, there was a troublesome reminder of this due to the existence of a military prison where Confederate soldiers were incarcerated. In

addition, there were literary and poetic allusions, such as that drawn by Abraham Lincoln from the Evangelist Mark as early as 1858 ("a house divided against itself cannot stand"). His appeal in his First Inaugural Address (1861) is amongst others. Walt Whitman also included the theme of the persistence of the Union and brethren at war with one another in his poetry and in a tribute to Lincoln.

[6]These should not be considered part of the original concept. Though the stylistic departure is striking, they are separated from the others sufficiently by space and landscape treatment to avoid a troublesome intrusion. They will not be considered here.

Figure 1. Guard House. (Photo courtesy of author)

Figure 2. Headquarters Building. (Photo courtesy of author)

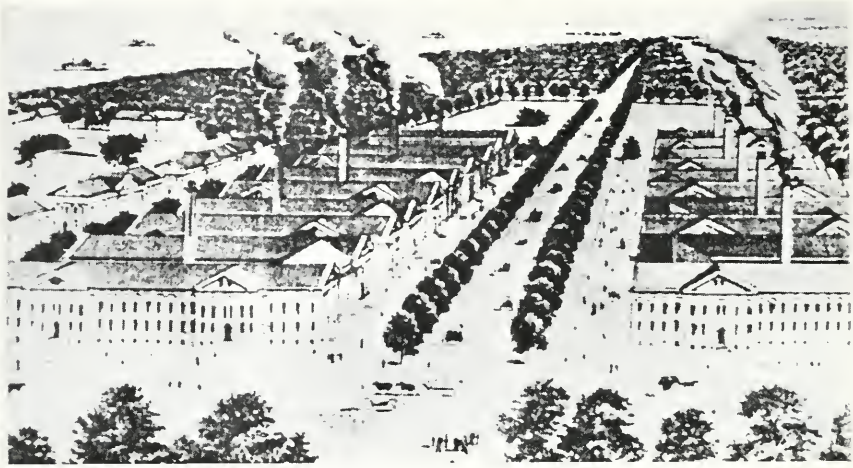
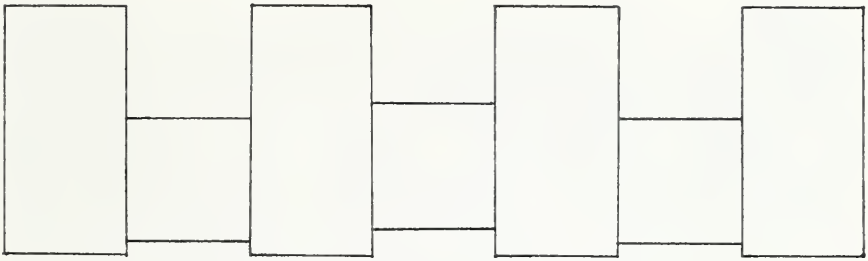


Figure 3. Rock Island Arsenal. Bird's eye view of Rodman Avenue and shop complex (1891). File photo of lithograph AARCOM Historical Office, Rock Island Arsenal.

Figure 4. Storehouse. (Photo courtesy of author)



Rodman Avenue

Figure 5. Diagram of paired U-shaped shop buildings (not to scale). See also fig. 6.

Figure 6. One set of four paired U-shaped shop buildings as seen from across Rodman Avenue. (Photo courtesy of author)

Figure 7. More deeply recessed central units of paired U-shaped shop buildings. (Photo courtesy of author)

Figure 8. Center shop building flanked by paired U-shaped shop buildings. (Photo courtesy of author)

Figure 9. Stone bridge. (Photo courtesy of author)

Figure 10. Commanding Officer's Quarters from southwest. (Photo courtesy of author)

Figure 11. Commanding Officer's Quarters from north. (Photo courtesy of author)

Figure 12. Commanding Officer's Quarters from southeast. (Photo courtesy of author)

Figure 13. Commanding Officer's Quarters. Detail of iron work on entry porch.

Figure 14. First subaltern's quarters. (Photo courtesy of author)

Figure 15. Second subaltern's quarters from northwest. (Photo courtesy of author)

Figure 16. Third subaltern's quarters. (Photo courtesy of author)

AN EARLY ITALIANATE MANSION IN BEARDSTOWN

Sarah Jane Sargent

The stately home located at the corner of Seventh and State streets in Beardstown, Illinois, is one of the city's earliest mansions and remains a distinctive example of nineteenth-century Italianate design. Although much of the documentation for the residence is lost, the date and circumstances surrounding the building of the home may be reconstructed on the basis of secondary sources. In addition, the home preserves many of the stylistic features associated with Italianate villas in America as they are described in the pattern books of architect Andrew Jackson Downing.

An early reference to the Seventh Street home appears in the *Daily Illinois Star Centennial Edition* of July 23, 1929. The article includes a photograph of the home as it existed in 1895 (fig. 1)[1] and refers to it as "Beardstown's first mansion":

> This two storey brick building which now stands at Seventh and State Street was Beardstown's first mansion. When erected about 1840 by J. C. Leonard, banker and grain dealer, it was not only Beardstown's most extravagant residence structure, but it was one of the show places of this part of the state. It cost $24,000, and the ground surrounding included the entire block between Seventh and Eighth and between State and Washington.

This 1929 reference appears to be a source of confusion in regard to the date of the Seventh Street home. The article mentions the year 1840, but later states that the residence was built "nearly 80 years ago," which would make the date 1849. The article also refers to J. C. Leonard as the original owner. Leonard's ownership and the 1840 date are mentioned together in later sources, but these all cite the 1929 *Centennial Edition* article. However, records indicate that J. C. Leonard did not own the properly until 1856.[2] In 1857, Mr. Leonard was married in a double ceremony which took place in the mansion's parlor.[3]

Another factor to be considered in dating the building is Beardstown's financial situation in 1840, especially in the banking business. During the late 1830's Illinois's internal improvement plan put the state deeply into debt. Currency depreciated, taxes were high, and business was stagnant.

There was widespread bankruptcy throughout the state, and money as an exchange was severely curtailed.[4]

The financial situation in 1840 and the fact that Leonard did not purchase the properly until 1856 indicate that the mid-50's date is more likely. Unless Leonard built the structure for someone else in the 1840's, the most probable date for the home is 1856.

The later history of the Seventh Street home reflects changing economic circumstances within the town. During the 1860's several surrounding counties were enjoying the financial advantage of new railroad facilities. Lacking this commercial advantage, Beardstown felt the crunch and was in a state of financial chaos. The Leonard Bank was a victim of this situation, claiming bankruptcy in 1866.[5] In 1871 J. C. Leonard lost the mansion.[6]

The next major resident of the home was Henry S. Schroeder, builder of Beardstown's Park Hotel and Opera House.[7] Schroeder owned the mansion from 1889 until 1907, when John T. Garm purchased it. Mr. Garm, a businessman and grain dealer, remodeled the interior of the home and resided there until the late 1930's.[8] While the nature of the interior remodeling is not known, he did build a garage for his Model T on the west side of the house.

During the late 1930's the mansion became Mae White's Nursing Home.[9] Apparently the three-storey home never functioned well in this capacity, for when a flood threat in 1943 caused a general evacuation of the town's residents, the occupants of the home were relocated. This decision may have also been the result of legislation enforcing new state safety laws. In 1946, the home was sold to the Fred Curry family, who removed the arcaded porches from the exterior but retained the home's basic structure and design. In 1965, the home was purchased by Mr. and Mrs. George B. (Bill) Bley, lifetime residents of Beardstown.

The Italianate style of the Seventh Street home was inspired by British and American interpretations of the Italian villa. Italianate homes were admired for their Romantic allusions to a more pastoral past and became a favored architectural style in the early days of the Industrial Revolution.[10] Andrew Jackson Downing, a prominent nineteenth century landscape architect and pattern book author, favored the Italian style for its "broad roofs, ample verandas, and arcades" which he thought were highly suitable for enduring the warm summer months. In his book *Architecture of Country Houses*, Downing noted that the style was "remarkable for expressing the elegant culture and variety of accomplishment of the retired citizen or man of the world."[11] Such elegance is evident both in the Beardstown mansion's vertical proportions as well as in the prominent role played by ornament. The rectangular, three-storey brick home is broad-roofed with large supporting Italiante brackets (figs. 1 and 2). Its tall, thin windows are round-headed and decorated with hoods or "eyebrows" (fig. 3). Paying homage to the sense of balanced proportion seen in Italian Renaissance palaces and villas, the storey heights diminish at the upper

levels. This is also emphasized in the fenestration, as the arched windows diminish in size at the upper stories.

The horizontal rhythm created by the numerous evenly-spaced windows is interrupted only on the mansion's front exterior wall where paired windows and an ornate balcony articulate the division between floors.[12] This division was even more apparent when ironwork ralings crowned the porch roofs. Although the porches were torn down earlier in this century, the nineteenth century entrance remains intact. Green double doors with matching "eyes" of glass lay beneath a semi-circular fanlight (fig. 4). The elaborate white trim, gracefully arched windows and doors, and visually rich red brick surface harmonize with the simple rectangular shapes of the design and vertical proportions to create the stately, comfortable elegance associated with the Italianate style.

The mansion's interior also exhibits Italianate features recalling the criterion advocated in Downing's *Country Houses:*

> The country house or villa never has less than three or four apartments of good size on the principle floor. In every home of moderate size we expect to find a separate apartment, devoted to meals, entitled the dining room; another devoted to social intercourse, or the drawing room; and a third devoted to intellectual culture, or the library; besides halls, passages, stairways, pantries, and bedrooms; and bathing-rooms on the second floor. A flight of back stairs, for the servants, is indispensable and adds greatly to the comfort and privacy of even small villas.[13]

Ceiling heights of fourteen feet and shuttered windows provide the mansion with the "elegant proportion and utmost comfort" that Downing ascribes to country homes of the first class.

The new Italian element of "circles subordinating and contrasting with the horizontal" favored by Downing is found not only in exterior windows and the doorway (figs. 2 and 3)[14] but is also featured in the parlor fireplace (fig. 5). According to Downing, the arched hearth, contrasting rectangular panel, and large mirror form a unified composition and "produce a very fine effect"[15] (the fireplace was moved to an upstairs bedroom in the 1930's). A complimentary but more intricate ornamental vocabulary appears in the parlor's pressed tin ceiling (fig. 6).[16]

The Seventh Street home also retains its nineteenth-century walnut staircase and newel post. The widening profile of the post and its grooved motif are characteristic of post designs in earlier dated homes (fig. 7).[17] It is interesting to note that the top cap of the post pops off to reveal a hollow interior. In the nineteenth century, important deeds and papers were often hidden inside the post. The bannister also was constructed with an internal wire system to facilitate repair. By inserting and rotating a metal tool at both ends of the balustrade the bannister posts and railings could be tightened.

The Seventh Street mansion is not only a reminder of nineteenth-century Italianate architecture in a western Illinois community, it is also a

reflection of Beardstown's prosperous beginnings. Following an influx of immigrants to the area, Beardstown developed into a flourishing center for Illinois trade and industry in the 1830's, boasting competition with cities like Cincinnati.[18] It was in the wake of this industrial and trading boom that Beardstown's affluent Italianate home was constructed.

The structure has retained its grandeur through floods, the Civil War, economic reversals, and years of family living. It functioned well as a nineteenth century home, providing a comfortable living environment for families and servants as well as a suitable space for social activities, including the wedding which took place soon after its construction. It is fortunate that the many changes in ownership and even in the function of the building have not appreciably diminished its original character. Happily, it retains its Italianate features and is symbolic of Beardstown's early prosperity.

NOTES

[1]*Beardstown Enterprise Souvenir Edition,* 1895.

[2]As stated in the property abstract on the home belonging to the present owner Mrs. George B. (Bill) Bley.

[3]Keith Strubbe, ed., *Cass County Marriages 1837-1879,* Cass County Historical Society, 1980.

[4]W. H. Perrin, *History of Cass County.* (Chicago, 1882), pp. 47-48.

[5]C. E. Martin, ed., *History of Cass County.* (Chicago, 1915), p. 711.

[6]Bley's property abstract, see above, note 2.

[7]*Biographical Review of Cass, Schuyler, and Brown Counties,* (Chicago, 1882).

[8]*The Daily Illinoian Star Centennial Edition,* July 23, 1929, p. 16.

[9]Interview with Mrs. George B. (Bill) Bley, conducted in June, 1987.

[10]C. Rifkind, *A Field Guide to American Architecture.* (New York, 1984), p. 50.

[11]A. J. Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses,* New York, 1968, p. 287 (first published in 1850).

[12]This feature is often associated with Italianate homes. See C. Rifkind, *A Field Guide,* p. 63.

[13]A. J. Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses,* p. 272.

[14]A. J. Downing, p. 380.

[15]A. J. Downing, p. 373.

Figure 1. Mansion at Seventh and State streets in Beardstown, Illinois from the southeast, as it appeared in 1895. (Photo courtesy of Mrs. George Bley)

Figure 2. Mansion, from the south. (Photo courtesy of Allan Schindle)

Figure 3. Mansion, from the south, window "hoods" and balcony. (Photo courtesy of Allan Schindle)

Figure 4. South entrance. (Photo courtesy of Allan Schindle)

Figure 5. Former parlor fireplace. (Photo courtesy of Allan Schindle)

Figure 6. Detail of parlor ceiling. (Photo courtesy of Allan Schindle)

Figure 7. Newel post and staircase. (Photo courtesy of Allan Schindle)

[16]A. J. Downing, p. 381.

[17]S. Maycock, *An Architectural History of Carbondale Illinois* (Carbondale, 1983), p. 56.

[18]C. E. Martin, ed., *History of Cass County* (Chicago, 1915), p. 665.

THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF BELLE JOHNSON FROM MONROE CITY, MISSOURI

Dean Howd

At the 1906 national meeting of the Photographic Association of America in Niagara Falls, twenty-five people were invited to exhibit their photos in a salon which was "to represent the American standard of professional excellence."[1] Only one woman, Belle Johnson of Monroe City, Missouri, was invited to contribute to that exhibition.

Belle Johnson, or "Miss Belle" as she was known, ran a successful photography business in Monroe City, Missouri for more than fifty years, and was one of only three or four women practicing professional photography in the state at the turn of the century.[2] Although she gained recognition during her lifetime, little of Belle Johnson's work survives,[3] and her name does not appear in literature on the history of photography. This article provides an introduction to and a documentation of her career and illustrates some of her creative work.

While she earned her living as a professional photographer making portraits for individuals, families, and organizations, Belle Johnson also produced a unique body of creative studio portraits and studies throughout her long career. It is primarily these images which brought honor and recognition to this rural Missouri photographer. Belle Johnson was born August 4, 1864 and raised in Mendota, Illinois. Her father was a successful farmer. She attended St. Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana between the years 1882-1884, and received top honors for her excellent work in astronomy, logic and English composition. After the graduation exercises in June, 1884, she settled with her older sister Mary whose husband, R. Manning Walker, was a jeweler and farmer in Monroe City, Missouri.

Between the years 1885-1890, Belle resided with the Walkers. There is an indication that she taught school during these years, but no records exist in Monroe City to verify this fact. In 1890 a position for a photographer's

assistant became available in a local studio. Since Belle was acquainted with the owner, she applied, with the idea of learning retouching as an avocation. However, three weeks after taking the job she purchased the studio, with the understanding that the previous owner remain a year in order for her to learn the business.[4]

Like many towns in Victorian America, Monroe City supported a photography studio which satisfied the demands both for portraiture and the documentation of town life.[5] On May 1, 1890, a notice in the "Monroe City News" stated: "Miss Belle Johnson has purchased Rippey's photograph gallery and will continue business at the old stead. Mr. Rippey has been employed to run the business."[6] The newspaper notice indicates the original owner was to remain as an employee, but this arrangement lasted only six months. Belle Johnson was soon on her own.

In her early years Belle studied and read all she could since she took over the Studio with so little training. She did not place an ad in the local paper until 1894, perhaps an indication that she did not feel fully confident about her new profession.

In 1903, when asked to give advice to amateur photographers, she stated: "As the professional, so should the amateur, read and study all that he can obtain upon the subject, learning thereby as well as stimulating his interest in the work. To the professional such help is second only to the conventions. Both should measure their own work, with that of other workers; the latter in the conventions and the former in the many competitions open to him."[7]

As late as 1906 and 1907 Belle was attending a photographic school in St. Louis to improve herself. The newspaper explains, "Her attendance at Conventions and Schools does not mean a neglect of duty at home, as some may think, but helps to keep her up to date in her profession."[8] In 1894 Belle Johnson became a charter member of the Photographic Association of Missouri and submitted her first photographs at their convention. Of the thirty-five entries, Belle placed third, "the two higher ones being only one-third of a point above you. In the competition were photographers of national reputation."[9] From that point the newspaper mentions many trips to regional Missouri and Illinois photography conventions. On one occasion (in 1906) she attended a national convention at Niagara Falls, New York.

Her work also appeared in invitational juried exhibitions known as salons, which were fashionable at the turn of the century. Her obituary claims she was the first woman to be asked to entera salon, a claim which cannot be verified here. It is enough to say that it was an honor for her work to be so highly regarded. Again in 1907, her work was in the national salon being held in Dayton, Ohio. It is not known whether she was invited into any other salons after that date.

On June 27, 1907, a special edition of the "Monroe City News" stated, "She is an honorary member of the Photographic Association of America and has won and received 13 medals at the association meetings in

competition with the photographers of the United States, including one from Paris, France."[10]

Belle Johnson's business seems to have been successful from the beginning. In 1890, Monroe City was a town of 2500 people, but she also drew clientele from the surrounding area including Paris and Shelbina, and as far east as Quincy and Hannibal.

She was first located in a building housing a dry goods store, on the second floor of the south side of West Winter Street. On February 2, 1899 there was a fire which destroyed the building. One local newspaper said, "Friends took charge of Miss Belle Johnson's Art Studio and made negatives, pictures, etc. jingle."[11] The "jingle" was the sound of her glass negatives hitting each other as they were being carried. Although there seems to have been no financial loss, she placed an ad stating that she would close her business in the Spring.

In November, 1899, a large ad appeared with this headline: "A Photographic Chat." C. S. Robertshaw, a local cigar maker, had opened a photographic studio above Turner's Drug Store, and hired Belle Johnson as operator. The studio was re-named "Robertshaw's Studio" and offered "superior grade photography." On March 14, 1901, new ads appeared which went back to "Belle Johnson, Photographs," and C. S. Robertshaw was never again mentioned. From that time on she would be the sole owner of her business.

In 1902 she had built her new studio above Walker's and the Monroe City Bank. Photographic studios during this period were often built on top floors in order to provide better lighting. At the bottom of the stairs leading up to her studio was a showcase in which she displayed photographs, and often exhibited her initials "BJ" spelled out with the ribbons and medals she had won. Upstairs an attractive waiting room was lined with photographs. A pair of double doors led into the Studio itself.

A newspaper article appearing on March 6, 1902 states, "Miss Belle Johnson has cause to be proud of her elegant new suite of rooms into which she recently moved her studio. The equipment, finish and general arrangement of her studio is such that places it second to none, probably, in northeast Missouri. The floors are laid out of two-inch oak and oiled. The walls and ceilings are covered with burlap, ingrain paper, etc., selected and arranged with splendid taste. This with numerous pictures, sofas, rugs and piano lend a very pretty effect."[12]

The studio was full of furniture and props, such as dolls for girls, and various stools and boxes, so she could create any type of staging she desired. There were also thick green velvet curtains hanging on the walls, typical of a portrait studio backdrop in that period. Along the north wall was a huge skylight, and people who remember going to the studio often recall how luminous the room was.

Off the studio, she had her own apartment. In later years her sister Mrs. Mattie Hanna came to live with her. A notable feature of her apartment was a bay window, where she had built a window seat stretching the entire

length of the window. There she could sit, read a book, and view the comings and goings in town.

As a professional photographer in the early twentieth century, Belle Johnson possessed considerable technical knowledge of the photographic process. Equipment was large and cumbersome. There is no record of what camera she used, but an article appearing in *Cassell's Cyclopaedia of Photography* published in 1911, may provide an indication: "The studio camera requires to be substantially made, rigidity and strength being here of primary importance, while portability is of secondary importance. It should have a swing back, a rising and falling front, and, if possible, a long bellows extension for use in copying."[13] People who visited the Studio recall how she would constantly be moving and hauling the large and awkward equipment.

In the early years of her career Johnson specialized in "cabinet pictures" produced by what was known as the "Aristo process," which the newspaper claimed "never fades and can be cleaned when in any manner soiled."[14] The cabinet photograph had been in existence since the 1860s when it had gained popularity by presenting portraits of public celebrities. They came on a standard size (6½" x 4¼") card and were popular up until World War I. These cards could be easily carried and stored.

The "Aristo process" was a general term for non-albumen printing papers first available in 1868, and developed and marketed until they came to dominate in the 1890's. The process was popular since the printing was done by sunlight, with a matt finish. Glass dry plate negatives were used by professional photographers until 1912, when flat film became available. Knowledge of this process may explain why Belle's Christmas ads would yearly state, "Sun sets about half past four o'clock in December. I need daylight to make negatives. Please bring children for negatives before two o'clock."

Belle hired assistants to aid in retouching the photographs. Miss Julia McClintic was one of those hired, and helped her for a number of years, and according to Ruby Byland was very active in aiding her employer. Crayons, india ink and pastels were also used in coloring the photographs, some work being sent to the East coast. In an article published in 1903, it was noted that Miss Johnson had not learned the art of retouching.[15] But, according to people who knew her she did much of the coloring herself.

Like many photographers of her time, Belle Johnson signed her work. Ruby Byland states, "Her early pictures carry "Miss Belle Johnson, Monroe City, Mo." Later, she used "Belle Johnson," some typed, some in script. Still later, she used block letters, "BELLE JOHNSON," and the last ones had the two initials, imprinted 'BJ'."[16]

Belle Johnson remained a single business woman all her life. She was one of the few women members of the Monroe City Business Men's Association.[17] In the July 19, 1919 issue of *Abel's Photographic Weekly,* Belle wrote a letter to the editor responding to the charges of discrimination against women in the photography profession. She says,

"From my entrance into the profession I have been on a common footing with the men."[18] She cited as having served as an officer in the Missouri Photographer's Association and the Missouri Valley Association as examples of being a full fledged member of the profession.

Selling photography required being involved with various photographic formats and promotions. Over the years she advertised cabinet photographs, penny pictures, photo buttons, post cards — comic or tragic — and souvenir post cards of Monroe City. Occasionally, she had a booth at the Monroe City fair, and would offer prizes. For example, in July of 1903 she offered to give away one to two dozen photos to the oldest woman at the fair, and the next day to the oldest man. Her reputation was well established by 1904 when the World's Fair was in St. Louis. She spent time taking photos for a publication of the World's Fair Ranch Club and a book published by the Missouri State Commissioners.

Another remarkable feature of Belle Johnson's career was that she never retired. She continued photography up to the time of her death in 1945 at the age of eighty-one. Her last effort was taking portraits of Monroe City's young men going off to World War II. Those portraits were published in the newspaper.

Belle Johnson is best known as a portrait photographer who used a wide variety of subjects. While still-life and landscape were also within her range of interest and ability, human and animal subjects, carefully staged and controlled in terms of light, are most captivating. People who went to her studio recall how she would constantly move and talk and get them to exactly where she wanted them to be. There is nothing accidental in her photographs. It is this precision which makes her photographs of animals, and children with animals, especially interesting.

She once advised other photographers by saying, "Cultivate your own methods of treatment. Your work will not be that of a copyist, which is never of much value. Were my desire to be realized I would be less trammeled, perhaps, by the thought, 'Will it please the customer.' The securing of rural scenes, homely occupations, character studies and the like is well within the easy reach of the photographer in the smaller towns. Such pictures are, if well done, eagerly sought for by the advertisers in our magazines."[19]

One area that she clearly excelled in was her work with animals. That must have required much patience, time and effort in order to capture a desired effect. The portraits of cats (fig. 1), for example, appear as carefully planned as if they were willing subjects. They are relaxed, focused and at ease in front of the camera, not allowing the presence of the photographer to bother them, and at the same time, allowing the photographer to totally capture them.

Much of the same is true in her photographs of children with animals. The interaction of the human and animal subjects is comfortable and natural. It is as if they know each other and belong together. For example,

the photograph of the racoon and child (fig. 2) appears to show two friends posing for the camera.

One her most intriguing photographs portrays three women with floor length hair (fig. 3). The hair itself is the fascinating aspect of the portrait. The women are a secondary consideration, as they are practically hidden from view by their hair. Essentially, they are seen from behind with their heads in profile. Once the eye has centered in on their faces, then the question of who they are enters. Certainly, a basic inquiry about any portrait centers on the person or people being photographed. However, in this case it is the uniqueness of the subject matter, the hair, that transcends the individuals themselves and makes for a most unusual and compelling image.

The *St. Louis and Canadian Photographer* once offered a critique of Belle Johnson's portraits of flowers: "Miss Johnson's flower pictures are exquisite, both in manipulation and the taste with which they are composed and handled."[20] Her photographs of flowers won prizes, (see figs. 4 and 5), and they attracted the attention of the *American Annual of Photography* in 1903. The editors approached Belle about writing an article centering on her methods of photographing flowers,[21] but such an article never appeared.

Belle was always in search of new and interesting subjects. Once, she discovered a hobo walking along the railroad tracks. Ruby Byland disagreed that the man was a hobo, but remembered him as a local farmer. Whatever his true occupation, Belle found him to be a sympathetic subject (fig. 6). The man was hungry, so in exchange for allowing her to photograph him she purchased him a meal. Although the photo never gained recognition by others, she always considered it one of her best works.

Within the community and among friends, Belle Johnson was a woman of idiosyncracies and humor. Her personality was often expressed through her light-hearted pictures of animals and children. There are children playing, and animals sometimes performing human tasks, such as one photograph of a cat jumping at a typewriter as if it just had hit the wrong key. Her own portrait (fig. 7) possesses an intriguing sense of energy as she gazes past her cat. That she chose this rather informal image of herself to be published is an indication of her own self image.

Bob Nickerson, a family friend, says he was invited to her home for dinner on many occasions, but can never recall having a complete meal. Once the entire meal consisted of strawberry short cake. Conversely, one newspaper story reported on an entire week of parties prepared by Miss Belle, stating, ". . . the hostess is noted almost as much for the 'beauty and good taste' of her cooked concoctions as she is for her fine photography.[22]

Belle Johnson died on July 19, 1945. Her obituary states that she underwent a major operation at St. Mary's in Quincy in April, and after several weeks of hospitalization she asked to return to the studio where

Figure 1. "Cats," Postcard, 5¾ x 3¾. (Photo courtesy of Robert Nickerson)

Figure 2. "Child (Mary Lucy Hornback) with Racoon," 4½ x 6½. (Photo courtesy of State Historical Society of Missouri)

Figure 3. "Three Women," 8¼ x 6. (Photo courtesy of Massillon Museum, Massillon, Ohio)

Figure 4. "Flowers," 6¼ x 8¼. (Photo courtesy of Massillon Museum, Massillon, Ohio)

Figure 5. "Peonies," 4 x 10. (Photo courtesy of Robert Nickerson)

Figure 6. "Hobo," 6½ x 4½. (Photo courtesy of Massillon Museum, Massillon, Ohio)

Figure 7. "Self-Portrait," 2 x 3. (Photo courtesy of Robert Nickerson)

she died. Stores in town were closed during the time of her funeral out of respect for one of Monroe City's leading citizens. In later years, a subdivision of homes was built on land once owned by Miss Johnson, and today "Belle" street is named in her honor.

A loss came when her studio was dismantled. Ruby Byland reports that all of her negatives and files were destroyed. Belle possessed complete files of negatives and photographs of the past owners. She often hired extra help to keep her files of negatives and photos labeled and in order. Ruby Byland states, "She had bought the business from the previous owner and the files were a very complete history of the time and area."[23] There are people in Monroe City who still own glass negatives and photographs, but the majority of her work was destroyed.

The largest single collection of her work exists at the Massillon Museum in Massillon, Ohio, which owns a collection of approximately 160 of her photos. The State Historical Society of Missouri, in Columbia, also owns a few photographs. The rest of her work remains in the hands of people in the Monroe City area.

Belle Johnson was not a pioneer in photography, nor was she an innovator. However, the work which survives is evidence of a dedicated and very talented professional, whose contributions deserve attention. Living in rural Missouri, she sought and gained regional and national recognition by producing photographs which were considered among the best of her time.

NOTES

[1]*Monroe City* (Mo.) *News,* 16 August 1906, p. 1.

[2]*St. Louis Globe Democrat,* 22 August 1899, p. 14.

[3]See below, p. 12, on the dismantling of Belle Johnson's Studio.

[4]A brief biography of Belle Johnson appears in *Western Camera Notes* 6, no. 10 (October, 1903). In this article, it mentions that she was dissatisfied with teaching school.

According to the *History of Monroe and Shelby Counties, Missouri* (St. Louis: National Historical Company, 1884, p. 308.) records of a photography studio in Monroe City exist as early as 1880 when William A. Bird moved his business from Shelbina, Missouri. It is not known, however, what happened to Mr. Bird. No information could be located on "Mr. Rippey" referred to in the next paragraph. Ruby Byland, who worked for Johnson in later years, refers to the previous owner as "Mr. Tydings." (Ruby Byland, Letter to Massillon Museum, 19 June 1969, File "Belle Johnson." Massillon Museum, Massillon, Ohio.) It is unclear just what the sequence of owners may have been.

[5]Time-Life Books, ed., *The Studio,* New York: 1971, p. 49.

[6]*Monroe City* (Mo.) *News* 1 May 1890, p. 3.

[7]*Western Camera Notes,* 6, no. 10 (October, 1903).

[8]*Monroe City* (Mo.) *News* 3 October 1907, p. 5.

[9]*Monroe City* (Mo.) *News* 1 November 1894, p. 1.

[10]*Monroe City* (Mo.) *News* 27 June 1907, p. 2. While a complete list of her prizes, awards, and sales for photographs does not exist, the appendices following this study provide partial information from available sources.

[11]*Monroe City* (Mo.) *Democrat* 2 February 1899, p. 1.

[12]*Monroe City* (Mo.) *News* 6 March 1902, p. 1.

[13]Jones, Bernard E., ed. *Cassell's Cyclopaedia of Photography* (London: Cassell and Company, 1911; Reprint ed., New York: Arno Press, 1973) p. 526.

[14]*Monroe City* (Mo.) *News* 24 May 1894, p. 5.

[15]*Western Camera Notes,* 6, no. 10 (October 1903).

[16]Ruby Byland, Letter to Massillon Museum, 9 September 1975, File "Belle Johnson." Massillon Museum, Massillon, Ohio.

[17]However there were other businesses in town owned and run by women. For example, after 1916, the editor and publisher of the *Monroe City News,* was a woman named Miss Anna E. Nolen.

[18]Belle Johnson, Letter to Editor, *Abel's Photographic Weekly* 24 (19 July, 1919), p. 604.

[19]*Western Camera Notes,* no. 10 (October, 1903).

[20]*St. Louis and Canadian Photographer,* April, 1904.

[21]*Monroe City* (Mo.) *News* 11 June 1903, p. 1.

[22]*Monroe City* (Mo.) *News* 27 October 1916, p. 1.

[23]Ruby Byland, Letter to Massillon Museum, 15 April 1969. File "Belle Johnson." Massillon Museum, Massillon, Ohio.

PHOTOGRAPHIC AWARDS

DATE

1894 Ranked third, Missouri Photographer's Association (M.P.A.). Reported *Monroe City News,* 1 November 1894, p. 1.

1895 Won medal from Missouri Photographer's Association reported in *Monroe City News,* 1 July 1897, p. 3.

1897 Secured second medal in Class C for Cabinet work M.P.A., Pertie Springs, Mo., reported *Monroe City News,* 19 August 1897, p. 1.

1899 Invited to attend Illinois Photographer's Association, Springfield, Illinois. *(Monroe City News,* 12 October 1899, p. 1.) Medal is shown in photograph from Massillon Museum.

1901 Won prize in the *Chicago Record-Herald's* contest for best amatuer photographs of flowers for table decoration. Reported *Monroe City News*, 22 August 1901, p. 1.

1902 Gold Medal, M.P.A., Pertie Springs. Reported in *Monroe City News*, 18 September 1902, p. 1.

1903 Awarded First Prize in the Continuous Camera Contest of the *Buffalo* (N.Y.) *Express*. These awards mentioned in *Monroe City News* 26 February, 1903, 16 July 1903, and 8 October 1903.

1903 M.P.A. gold medal in Class E — that of views. Reported in *Monroe City News*, 16 July 1903.

1905 M.P.A., Springfield, Mo., two medals, in the commercial and portrait classes. Reported in *Monroe City News*, 22 June 1905.

1906 M.P.A., Excelsior Springs, "a diploma of honor in one class, a gold medal for her baby pictures in another class, a twenty-five dollar cash prize and last, but best, a great silver loving cup to keep for year." *Monroe City News*, 28 June 1906.

1906 Salon at Niagara Falls, New York. Reported in *Monroe City News*, 16 August 1906.

1907 From Excelsior Springs, Mo., M.P.A. Medal from Genie Club, first prize in portrait class for a town of 20,000 or less, first prize in extra class (devoted to developing papers) and a diploma in rating class." Reported in *Monroe City News*, 27 June 1907. In the same issue, it reports she had won thirteen medals in total, including one from Paris, France.

1907 Salon honors at National convention in Dayton, Ohio. Reported in *Monroe City News*, 15 August 1907.

1916 Award for Best Picture Cover Page for a Farm Journal from *Camera Craft* magazine. Reported *Monroe City News*, 10 March 1916.

1917 G. H. Croughton and Eastman Kodak use a photo at National Photography Association of Canada. Reported in *Monroe City News*, 15 June 1917.

PICTURE SOURCES OF BELLE JOHNSON PHOTOGRAPHS

American Annual of Photography
1904, pp. 107, 171.
1906, p. 105.
1907, p. 170
1909, pp. 32, 53.
1910, p. 305.
1911, pp. 134, 211.
1912, pp. 153, 223.
1913, Insert p. 76, p. 120.
1914, p. 191.

1915, p. 227.
1916, p. 221.
1917, Inserts pp. 64, 137.
1918, Insert p. 24.
1919, p. 9.
1921, p. 87 and Insert p. 104.
1926, p. 51.

Buffalo (New York) *Illustrated Express.* (Title varies)
12/28/02, p. 3 (two photos)
1/4/03, pp. 3, 4.
1/25/03, p. 4.
2/15/03, p. 2.
3/24/03, p. 8.
5/3/03, p. 8
5/10/03, pp. 3, 8.
5/24/03, p. 8.
6/14/03, p. 8.

National Geographic, vol. 38, no. 4, October, 1920. Ralph A Graves, "Human Emotion Recorded by Photography," plates v and xiii.

Sears, Stephen W., et al. *Hometown U.S.A.* (New York: American Heritage Publishing, 1975), p. 88.

St. Louis and Canadian Photographer, April, 1904. Includes series of seven photographs, plus short critique.

Western Camera Notes. Minneapolis: October, 1903. Includes three photographs.

Wilson's Photographic Magazine., Vol. LI, no. 5, May, 1914. "Women Who Have Won Fame in Photography." pp. 199-209. Includes portrait of Belle Johnson, p. 204, and two photographs, p. 209.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF REGIONAL ARTS: A CONVERSATION WITH GEORGE M. IRWIN OF QUINCY*

David Raizman

The vitality of the arts at all levels depends upon the commitment and the dedication of individuals who believe strongly in their significance. For some of these individuals, it is not enough to collect works of art or to travel to see them. Rather they have a desire to share their own interest and strive to enable others to have the opportunity to make art an enriching part of their lives. One of these people is George M. Irwin of Quincy, Illinois.

After graduating from the University of Michigan in 1943, Mr. Irwin returned to his family home in Quincy. In 1961, he became the Chairman of the Board of Directors of Irwin Paper Company and the Quincy Compressor Company. Starting in 1947, he took an active role in organizing arts organizations in the area. Later he worked to establish the Illinois Arts Council as he acquired his own substantial personal collection of European and American art. In 1964, Mr. Irwin devoted considerable energies to restoring a mid-nineteenth century Italianate home in Quincy where he now resides. The home showcases many of the finest works in his collection, now almost exclusively devoted to American art and the works of many Illinois artists. He retired from business in 1971.

In this interview, conducted in his Quincy home on September 1, 1987, Mr. Irwin discusses primarily his own involvement in the arts spanning more than forty years. The interview focuses upon the role of art (both fine

*The author would like to thank Donna Wynn of the Art Department at Western Illinois University, whose transcription of the taped interview greatly facilitated the preparation of this article.

art and more popular forms as well) in the western Illinois region, and the ways in which it contributes to the welfare of the smaller community. The interview documents many of Mr. Irwin's own efforts to promote the arts at the local and state levels, and offers some suggestions for improving the level of general cultural awareness at the regional level.

Raizman: You've had a long history of involvement in the visual arts, both as a collector and as an advocate at the state and national levels. I wonder if you could recall what experience first attracted you to art, and how that attraction developed from an interest into something resembling more of a passion.

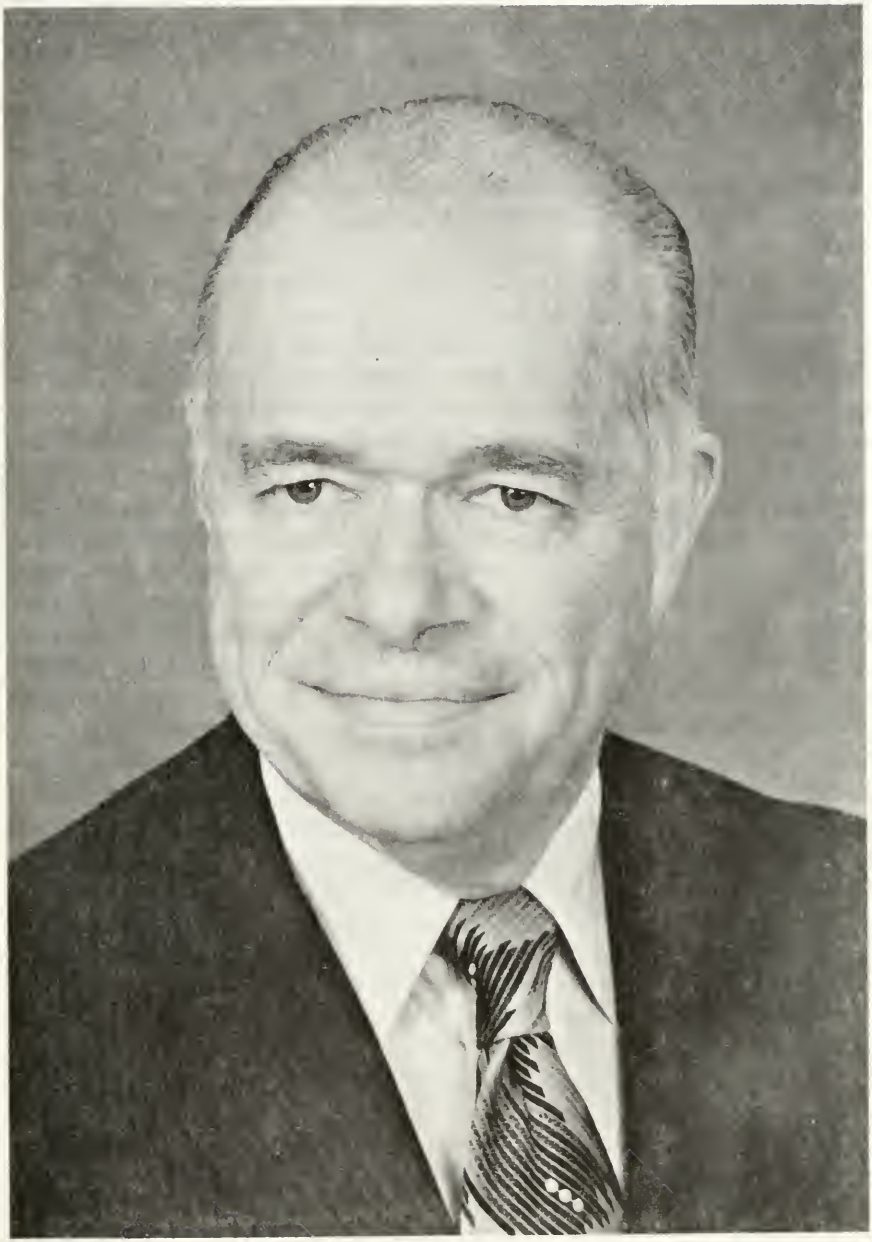
Irwin: Actually my first interest was in the performing arts area, though I did enroll in a few classes at the Quincy Art Center as a grade school student. I got interested in playing in the high school band and orchestra as a clarinetist and did some student conducting; I also went to the National Music Camp at Interlochen for several summers, back in the 1930's. When I got to college, I didn't take music or art courses, but I did play in the University of Michigan concert band and marching band. The visual arts activities didn't come until well into those college years. I particularly remember an exhibit of watercolors by John Marin (American, 1870-1953) at the university museum. I came very close to calling home and asking my father if he would loan me $1,000 so I could buy four of them. Of course, in retrospect, I was a fool not to have done that. I finally bought a Marin watercolor much later and for much much more money than that, but that exhibit stimulated my interest. When I graduated from college, I decided to return to live here in Quincy. The Quincy Art Center, operated by the Quincy Art Club, had a very aggressive traveling exhibit booking program, and that was back in the days when people like the Walker Art Center (Minneapolis) and the Museum of Modern Art in New York were sending out traveling exhibits designed for small museums and art centers. You didn't have the prohibitive insurance and other problems that you do now. So it was really from those early traveling exhibits that I decided to purchase my first painting, a gouache by the English artist John Piper, from one of those traveling shows. After that I started doing a little traveling. I became acquainted with a gallery in New York from whom I had bought this work — the Curt Valentine Gallery — and it just sort of took off from there.

Raizman: And what year was that?

Irwin: That was in 1950.

Raizman: It's interesting to learn that the interest you developed in college didn't dissipate when you returned to Quincy because there was an active traveling exhibition program in the region. That leads me to inquire about your views concerning importance and strength of regional art centers.

Irwin: There's no question about their importance, and of course the big problem with a lot of them now is finding the money just to book these exhibits, or to provide adequate spaces in which to hang them. That's one



George Irwin

of the problems that the people here in Quincy are facing right now while they're planning a half-million dollar addition to the little 1887 wooden carriage house that they're in at the moment. They can't get some exhibits that they might otherwise afford because of the nature of the structure, being wooden, subject to fire and just not that safe for a lot of these shows to travel. That's been brought about, I think mostly in the last ten years, by the terrific increase in the value of art of all kinds. But nothing beats the live object — color slide presentations or other types of reproductions simply don't do it. You don't have the same kind of emotional or general visual experience that you do when you look at the real thing.

Raizman: So economic conditions mitigate against the growth and stimulation of the visual arts.

Irwin: I think it's really the responsibility of larger centers (and they don't have to be that much larger) that do have quality work in their private collections, to make these available to smaller centers, either in organized shows or in the loan of occasional or several works. We've done that over the years with the Illinois State Museum, the Krannert Art Museum in Champaign, and other regional museums. Actually these larger museums — well I would include Macomb, too, because the Western Illinois University Art Gallery is a fine facility with an interesting permanent collection — can help some of the smaller groups. In many cases they have trained professional staff, or it might be an artist who's got a part-time job there. In the Quincy case there is not trained staff, just a part-time secretary, that's about all they can afford at the moment. But I think that dealing with the larger institutions that will make things available — those larger institutions can help, and in fact train volunteers in how to mount exhibits and the care and handling of art work, and just some professional guidelines to go by. Larger regional museums have an educational responsibility to let people know what they have — in effect to tell people how to go about organizing and hanging exhibitions and offer other kinds of advice. A lot of these small regional or local centers don't have that much imagination, and are in need of new ideas. There's a need, for instance, for exposure to more than just regional artists' work. I'm certainly not putting down regional artists, but there are a lot of fine professionals, mostly on a faculty somewhere in a college or university. A community should not be satisfied with just showing its Sunday painters or its part-time painters or sculptors. There's a lot more to what goes on in this country than what happens within a 150-mile radius of a given place. Most small centers tend to be a little lazy and not aggressive enough to look further for new kinds of visual experience.

Raizman: In other words the larger regional centers can act as a liaison between the small community and the greater international world of fine art.

Irwin: Exactly. And if those intermediate-level museums with professional staff, climate control and all those things are in the good posi-

tion to be the borrowers from even the bigger institutions like the St. Louis Art Museum or the Chicago Art Institute, the liaison can work in that way too.

Raizman: That's true. Now the lack of this kind of network would result in cultural isolation. Without these liaisons, places like Macomb or Quincy would not offer enough for the artist or art-going public to remain stimulated. And yet your own career indicates that you haven't felt this isolation. Living in Quincy was your decision when you could have presumably settled in another place which offered more contact with fine art. Yet you've chosen to live here, which means that you must believe in the ability of communities such as this to have a viable cultural life.

Irwin: Well I know it can work. Several years ago — it was 1969 to 1972, a four year period — the Quincy Art Club received a grant to hire a professional director and money to put together exhibits. There was a lot of co-op exhibit work going on then with Western Illinois University and the Quincy group, with the Springfield Art Association, with the Illinois State Museum, and we brought a number of major artists to the region for lecture demonstrations, slide shows, exhibits of their work, and it was all organized so that the artist or the exhibit came to one institution and was automatically booked at the other two. So when you do things on even that kind of an expanded regional booking basis, you're just like performing artists. It's much better if you can offer a violinist, say a week or two weeks of engagements. He cuts down his travel time, he just has to go from one town to another in a restricted area, so you're not spending a lot of money on bringing him here from New York or California. The same is true with the visual artist. You can offer a more interesting package while you get a better response and better quality of work. Then at the same time, the individual that is in a somewhat isolated community like Quincy has to also take the initiative to go to the larger cities occasionally and see what's going on, and buy a few art magazines to make himself aware of what is happening so he will make better buying judgments when he gets involved with the local efforts. And as I say, if people don't make these extra efforts, they sort of fall into the easy path of doing what they did last year, and that's not good enough. One must always try to find something a little more challenging and a little more interesting. These cooperative efforts, like planning something in harmony with other communities, produce something greater than several little isolated things done by themselves. You see there's really no limit, and I would almost say that in terms of dollars, if you generate the ideas and do the planning. I always take the position that if you do the idea work, do the professional planning, and the good management planning, too, the money will be there.

Raizman: So you basically are an optimist?

Irwin: Oh, sure. People generally don't work hard enough at these things, or don't stop and think it through. I'm afraid this is true with some larger arts organizations, too, in big cities, because I've had experiences

with those in Chicago and New York with a number of national and state boards, and I've seen some comments made and decisions proposed on some of those boards that are just as shallow and not well thought out as anything that floats out of a small community board meeting. But the more people you have on your board that have some background and knowledge and some experience, the more balanced the end result will be. If everybody is sitting there with no experience at all, you're going to get some pretty bad decision making.

Raizman: How would you characterize what it is about the arts that make them worthwhile? What do they contribute to the life of the community that they might not otherwise have or that they might not get somewhere else?

Irwin: Personally it's an emotional response to something, it's a stimulus when you look, a satisfaction you get, even without training. And the more you see the more you hone your perception and abilities. But it's just this response of feeling good or even maybe feeling agitated or feeling offended at something, and then stopping to think, "Now why does that picture bother me?," for example, or "Why did that musical composition bother me?" And if they'll go beyond the initial reaction, whatever it might be — good, bad, or indifferent — then they're starting to learn, and starting to get some kind of basis for making even more sophisticated judgements. I think the whole basis of quality and establishing quality standards — anybody can do it, but most people are hesitant to do it because they say, "Oh gosh. I don't know anything about that," or the other response, "I know what I like," which really means, "I like what I know," so that the mind has to be open to new ideas. It doesn't make any difference to me. I'm perfectly at home with a realist painting as well as with a completely non-objective one as long as I feel the artist knows how to draw. You don't always have to know, "What does that painting mean?" Really, it means a lot of different things to a lot of different people. I think the more you stick labels on pictures, probably the worse it is because you restrict the viewers in slots, as you're locking them into a narrower reaction.

I also think it increases one's tolerance and the ability to think or to respond. It's creating a better person. You can do it through formal education; you can do it through informal education, like one gets in a gallery or from listening to a concert, or seeing a good play, or just reading good literature.

Raizman: I'm interested in finding out a little bit more about the history of your collection and also about your involvement as a citizen of the Quincy community and what you've done to promote awareness of the arts over the years.

Irwin: As I said, I started collecting in 1950, mainly as the result of seeing a John Piper gouache (British, b. 1903) in a Museum of Modern Art show, and then making the conscious decision that I would like to collect more art. At that time there were almost no galleries in Chicago or St.

Louis, so I began making more trips to New York, and finally other galleries started to grow in St. Louis and Chicago. At first, I started collecting name European artists, and primarily works on paper and sculpture that I seemed to respond to a little more strongly than I do paintings. And so that's what I did for the first half dozen years or so. I didn't buy any American work for a while. I wish now I had done that a little more strongly. During the 1950's I started reading several art magazines and found out that there was a great deal going on in this country in the post WWII period. Although I became acquainted with 19th-century American painting as well (I owned paintings by Kensett and Moran which I've since sold), I eventually decided to stick with the 20th century, and I gradually worked toward collecting all American works, which I've probably done now for the last ten or fifteen years. I've sold off probably most of the European pieces that I had. There are still a few around, as you can see. Some of them will stay, some will go, but that was the general framework.

In the late forties and fifties, the whole Community Arts Council development started. It was first at the community level, and I was involved in starting the one here in Quincy which turned out to be the first one in the country, although we didn't know that at the time. We just knew that there was a need for some coordinated work in the arts, and we wanted to avoid scheduling conflicts among the groups who supported various art activities in the community; that's how it began.

Also, in 1960 the New York State Arts Council was formed, primarily through Nelson Rockefeller, who initially funded it until it received state support. At that time I was involved with the National Board of the American Symphony Orchestra League, because I had started and was conducting the Quincy Symphony Orchestra here. The director of that organization became interested in this community council movement which was starting to pop up here and there as a result of a transplant from the British national-government-dominated approach to arts councils and the Canadian experience, which was mixed — both provincial and national. So we had some sessions and became acquainted with other people who were doing this community arts council work too. The Junior Leagues of America also were a big stimulus at this time, but they were only in communities of 50,000 people and over, so we didn't see anything of them around here. And then a group of us formed our own organization which is now known as The American Council of the Arts, and I served as the first chairman of that for a number of years. That office is still active in New York City and has greatly expanded. That gave me a chance to look at other galleries, and I saw a lot more contemporary American work and also some early 20th century American work as well, like the Bellows lithographs that I have, and a number of other pieces — Hopper and other American Realists. I guess at that point, it sort of crystalized my thinking that trying to spread between Europe and the United States was just too much, and that's where I started to work toward acquiring just Americans.

Raizman: So your collecting was influenced by your advocacy for the arts at the state and national level because that experience brought you into contact with works that you wanted to purchase.

Irwin: Oh sure. it did have a lot to do with it. And then when we formed the Illinois Arts Council (the first committee meeting took place in 1963, followed by legislation in 1965), I served as chairman seven or eight years, and we started an office in Chicago, so I was more and more in Chicago. One of the first things we did was to organize traveling exhibits by Illinois artists, because very few of them had gallery representation at that time. There were only one or two galleries. One gallery I remember well, which is no longer in existence in Chicago, was pushing Illinois based artists, and the place to find them then as now is in colleges and universities. Most every small college has got at least one pretty good artist in its art department. Sometimes that's the whole department. And the expansion of colleges and universities, and so-called artist-in-residence programs, all of that has helped. So I got acquainted with a lot of Illinois artists that way through the traveling exhibits and bought a lot of my Illinois artists collection directly from the artists. And I've probably got fifty or sixty different Illinois artists in the collection. A lot of people have moved by now, but a lot of them are still here. That was sort of the way it formed — not all that consciously, it was just a matter of experiencing over the years which way I wanted to go.

Raizman: The budget of the Illinois Arts Council comes from the state, and that means in effect that people's tax dollars are used for this kind of cultural enrichment.

Irwin: Primarily, yes. They do receive federal monies in the amount of about seven million dollars from the state now, and a modest part of it from the National Endowment for the Arts, too.

We started out the first year with a two-year appropriation of $25,000, and with that money we hired a director and a secretary. The Governor gave us free space in his office in Chicago, so we had to go out and get private grant money to underwrite the programs, which we did. They still may do a little of that, but not too much anymore. Most of our program monies came as a result of the private grants from corporations and Illinois based foundations. That was another great avenue for me to get acquainted, because at that time I started to do a lot more traveling around the state, and I'd go to openings of exhibits that we were sponsoring in different areas, or I would go to, say, an opening at Lakeview in Peoria or the museum in Mt. Vernon, Illinois, or Urbana, or wherever, just to get acquainted with what was happening.

Raizman: Then you were really involved at a very early stage in the movement of public funding for the arts. That was a rather new idea.

Irwin: Oh yes. A lot of us lobbied quite a bit, and I testified in Congress on the first National Endowment for the Arts legislation back in 1965.

Raizman: What were some of the arguments, the gist of the statements

that were made to convince Congress and the state legislature to allocate state or federal monies to promote and support the arts?

Irwin: Some of it was just pressure. I remember one state senator who was primarily interested in his nearest state university. He was a Republican and our director was a Democrat. I'm a Republican, so we worked different sides of the aisle, and this guy we are talking about was quite conservative. I had asked a couple of my friends to talk to him because he was a key person on the Appropriations Committee, and he finally said, "All right, I'll support your appropriation for $200,000, but don't ask for any more than that or I'll vote against it." That gives you an idea of what was going on. To answer your question, we used several arguments as I recall. One was to note that the resources in the state were all stacked up in Chicago, and there are a few in Springfield, Peoria, and in Rockford, but really that's not fair to people in the rest of the state. "We've got to be able to get some more of these resources spread around and give people in your community, Senator, or your community, Mr. State Representative, a chance to hear a good concert or see a good play, or see a good exhibit of art particularly by our Illinois artists." We used that angle, too. The Illinois artists are voters too. So we worked those arguments, and just the need for people to see more art, reminding legislators that the arts do help the quality of life in their communities, and that the legislators can get credit for helping us bring this to several of your towns, and look, the money is peanuts compared to paving a mile of highway, and we tried to make contrasts like that.

For a while it wasn't how much money we were going to get but whether or not the council should exist at all. This started under Governor Otto Kerner who gave very good support to it, and made his best staff available to us so we always knew what people to talk to and when the hearings were going to be, and all that kind of information. It was a slow process for a while. But now the fact that it is established I think is pretty well accepted. The question is, just how much? But we've tried to do as much diversity as possible. We've had a couple of small exhibits from the Art Institute that traveled, and the first program that we sponsored was the Chicago Symphony in Springfield, Illinois, sponsored by the Springfield Chapter of the National Secretaries Association. So we tried to be as diversified as possible. There wasn't much theatre; it was mostly at that point music, some small ensembles, and we stuck with as quality a product as we could put together.

Raizman: Are you pleased with the history of the Illinois Arts Council and the projects that they have been able to fund over the last two decades?

Irwin: Generally yes. Occasionally there have been some problems, mainly because of inept leadership either at the volunteer or at the staff levels, which happens in any organization from time to time. It has gotten a little too political at points, but I think overall it's been very good. There's certainly been a good growth period with no major catastrophies. There've

been a few minor ones once in a while, when some senator or representative didn't like a grant that we gave to somebody because we might have been a little too liberal, particularly in the literature area. But beyond that, I don't recall that really major problems developed in any year. Of course now the business of supporting the arts is a lot more recognized than it was back in the sixties or even the early seventies. The national growth picture has helped — you read a heck of a lot more in newspapers and magazines about what communities are doing to support their arts organizations, and that kind of thing is very helpful because if someone can read in a magazine or a newspaper what another community, maybe even the same size town or certainly less than metropolitan size, is doing in the arts areas, it might give some local people a chance to say, "Gosh, we could do that." This is true in architecture, too, and in historic preservation. After all, architecture is an art form as well. To give people examples of what they can do, sometimes to present an argument and make a case for something, can be very difficult if you can't point to successful examples elsewhere where someone has done something of a similar nature. Anywhere in the country, it doesn't make any difference where it is, just showing that community involvement and organization has gotten something done which might be bigger than the town thought that they could do. That's one of the things that has always intrigued me. I think the community generally can always do a lot more than they think they can in a lot of areas.

Raizman: I'm glad you mentioned architecture because it is a resource that's just there in almost every western Illinois regional community.

Irwin: Oh sure. As a matter of fact, that's really the only art form that you'll find present in practically any town or village of any size. There are always a couple of good buildings in any community, and to get people to respect those and think of ways that they might be recycled — it doesn't have to be for the original use — a house can become an office, or it can become a museum, or a store, or a store can become living quarters. But again, recognizing what the esthetic aspects of the structure are requires just a minimal knowledge of architecture. Nobody has to be an expert. Of course Quincy has got this great wealth of architecture, I think more than any other community in the state except the whole Chicago area, but that's 5 million people up there. But I don't know of any other town, including Galena, that has the scope, quality, and breadth of what we have here in Quincy. And getting people to appreciate that, living in it, using it, but respecting the structure and not slapping a porch on that's not properly designed or certainly not putting aluminum siding on, and things like that, or even using paint colors appropriate to the period. You have lots of choices. It's just a matter of doing something that is appropriate to that period.

Raizman: Yes. I think that in terms of architecture that it is a living tradition as long as we continue to recognize and preserve it.

Irwin: Of course. Once the building is gone, you have photographs, but

that's like listening to a record or looking at a painting on a printed page. It's not the same thing.

Raizman: And the aesthetic sensibility that is behind good architecture continues through the widespread efforts to remodel or restore.

Irwin: Yes. Renovated, restored, recycled, whatever word you want to use. Quality in architecture can be a part of any regional arts program. And something else, arts facilities should not be housed in a lousy building. You've got to do something to improve the quality of space they are in, restore the facade, or if it's an undistinguished building, maybe have a new facade constructed, or do a sensitive job on the interior, even if walls get moved. Because that makes a statement of what you are, in a way — the space that you occupy. It's true with a home. If somebody is careless and doesn't keep up the house, and lets a porch railing fall off, that says they don't really care. But if they're concerned about it and keep it neat, even if it just needs a coat of paint, if a thing is kept neat and clean, and inappropriate changes are avoided, then that to me says a person does care a little bit, even though they might not have enough money to do everything they want to do with it.

Raizman: I've been living in Macomb for a few years now, and one of the things that's affected me most about small-town living is the self-sufficiency of the average citizen. It must be a carry over from pioneer days.

Irwin: I think that's right, because for a while people were sort of forgetting what to do. But again, stimulated by a huge interest in historic preservation and the availability of reproduction hardware, all this is encouraging the "do it yourself-er," and that spills over into all kinds of areas.

Raizman: I guess the ideal would be that the level of skill could be matched by the level of aesthetic sensibility, because the skill in itself isn't always sufficient.

Getting back to the part of the question that we haven't touched on, what do you feel about the importance of your own background, and the way in which your upbringing in Quincy shaped your interest in the arts and your career in general?

Irwin: When I went to college I was a speech major and was thinking about going into radio broadcasting, and then in my senior year I decided not to do that. I made a conscious decision to come back here and work in the family business and have some time to get into community activities, because I felt an obligation to do these kinds of things and there were certainly lots of opportunities; even though some of the organizations didn't exist, we created them and developed activities that are still going on. So I had this kind of overriding commitment to do something.

Raizman: Was that sort of a family tradition?

Irwin: My grandfather had always been very active in a lot of community organizations. He got manual training started in the public schools years ago, was intrigued with the Battle Creek health food stuff when it came

out, and those kinds of things. So probably that was inherited, and both my father and mother encouraged me to go into these kinds of activities, so that was probably the reason I did that and had some spare time that I could use and devote to these activities and see that the need was there. The first stimulus was the fact that I had played clarinet all these years, then I come back as an adult and asked myself, "What do I do with it?" There was nothing around, so we created some organizations — first a chamber music group, and then that gradually developed into the symphony. It spilled over into the visual arts areas, too. You get to looking around and think, "What else is there that one might do?" My interest in architecture has come more recently, in the last twenty or twenty-five years.

Raizman: Since you purchased this home?

Irwin: No. It started before that. I was working on another Italianate house. It was built in 1872. This one dates from 1857. Now I'm trying to clear out some space, because I'm getting to the point in life where I've got to start getting rid of some things. I'm thinning down the collection, too. It got up to about 500 pieces and that was too much because there are a lot of unframed prints and portfolios, and a number of framed things just sitting in closets. I do move things around, but still there is a lot of art that doesn't get looked at very often, so I'm trying to cut back, and I think I'm down to about 400 pieces now.

Raizman: There's another issue I'd like you to comment on. Here in your living room, I'm looking at a Cezanne lithograph and if I turn my head slightly I see a brush drawing by Matisse. These are all works of established fine art. We've also been speaking this morning about architecture, and that's more of a regional and grassroots tradition. But there's another more popular level at which art functions, for instance, the trade in antiques or even the flea markets and collectible shows. This in turn touches upon the promotion of art at a local level through festivals and tourism that we find in events like the Spoon River Drive. What thoughts do you have about these movements?

Irwin: I'm all in favor of getting art out of the museums and displaying it in other settings where people are accustomed to going. Now in a big city it's different. Sometimes you've got to limit the crowd to view the exhibit. But in smaller communities, you really are out beating the bushes to get people to come and look at what you have. So it seems to me that it's a good idea to place art in settings where people go customarily, in a bank or savings and loan association. Even in some kinds of stores or lobbies of buildings where there is some degree of control. Certainly the display of local regional artists in situations like that is always good. And communities can do a lot more of that. There's a lot of that going on around here. Both hospitals, I think, show work in their lobbies, and a couple of the clinics do, and a few places like that — the lobby of a community college. The more of that, the better it is because people then will see art in a context really I think for one of the reasons it was done,

and that is to be seen by people. It doesn't have to be in a private home or in a museum where you pay a few dollars or even if you get in free. If somebody sees art as they're going to get their groceries or as they're going to do their banking or whatever they're going to do, you know there are impressions that will last, and I think that that's certainly a good way of improving the quality of life.

The problem now with the value of the art object zooming up so much is that you do have to have some restrictions and some areas of control. We're right in the middle of planning now an exhibit of quilts which will open in the Gardner Museum of Architecture and Design as our big fall exhibit in early October here in Quincy. In a number of cases lenders are quite flexible, but for others we have to put some of the quilts behind glass or hang them out of the reach of anybody so there can be no touching, because just oil from the fingers of a lot of people will react on the quilt surfaces. And lenders of more valuable work are naturally more apprehensive about where it's going to be put. But to the extent that it's possible, I think communities can do much much more than they do in getting art out and putting it in public places. And even an occasional sculpture in a public place, not necessarily a statue of the local "leading light." Of course, the whole program of Art in Public Places of the National Endowment is a good example of this thing operating on a higher level. But in that case you're talking about very expensive pieces, primarily sculpture, in community settings. But art that is bought by corporations and displayed in their offices and their lobbies is certainly a valuable trend. I was reading an article recently about the Chase Bank collection which has its own curator, as do many of these corporate collections, and their curator will spend up to two million dollars a year on the purchase of art work. So there are a lot of sources whereby these things can be done and the average person can see art. He doesn't have to buy it himself, and the more that's made available, the more you develop an appreciation or at least you stimulate an interest in the office worker, or even the factory worker who sees it as he checks in. That then might encourage him to go and look at what's in the more formal setting at the local art center.

Raizman: Certainly the museum and the art center don't have to be restricted by always hanging and mounting sculptures, lithographs, prints, or paintings on walls. There are aesthetic qualities to objects like collectibles that make their way, for instance into *Smithsonian,* and these are materials that can be exhibited too. There is certainly no lack of enthusiasm for the local flea market which usually contains a lot of interesting things.

Irwin: To get back to fostering a familiarity with fine art for a moment, several communities have done very well (though many have not), in developing a liaison with the local public schools. Most public school art programs are pretty dull. They tend to be artsie-craftsie kinds of programs and the kids seldom see a real live quality painting or drawing. Docents or volunteers from a local arts center working a cooperative program with the

public schools can take paintings out to classrooms and talk with kids about "Here's the real thing," and respond to questions, etc. Years ago Rockford started one of those programs, as I recall, and it may still be going. I hope it is. These are important things that can be done with little money. Start out with the best work you can find from your local artists, which is one way of developing name recognition. A number of the kids in the class might actually know that artist and know him by name, and if they can see some of his work, that's even better; then you go on from there, upgrading things. There's nothing that beats the life experience.

Raizman: I came here with an interest in finding out more about you, but I didn't expect that we'd get so many helpful and practical suggestions on how to expose our citizens to art. Also, so many of the things that you've talked about and been so involved in are being mentioned in more abstract form by the Board of Higher Education and other public institutions. These organizations often refer to "outreach" and "regional cooperative efforts" to improve education. Your career is an encouragement, because you've demonstrated by concrete example that things can happen and that things have been done.

Irwin: There's one more point that ought to be made, I think, and it's also about arts programs in public schools. Too many administrators, it seems to me, and probably too many teachers as well, think of their music, art, or theatre programs as just for the kids that get involved in them. That really isn't true at all. The arts programs are for the whole school body and should be encouraged by the administration to provide an arts experience for everyone, not just a few dozen or a few hundred of the ones that are participating. And even one step beyond that, the fact that they participate in an art program, a theatre program, or a music program (chorus, orchestra, or band), whatever it is, doesn't mean that they are going to be professional musicians. A lot of educators that I've found in the past few years seem to hide behind this angle that, "Oh well we can't afford to do that because we're not in the business of training professional musicians." Well of course that's not a fair assessment of the issue. What they should be interested in is training good humanists and training good generalists. And the more people you get involved in these programs, even in a very small way, the better it is. A student can be in theatre work and be behind the lights or help with costumes or scenery-building, or whatever. And when these people get out of school, they become good audience members, because they've had this firsthand exposure to the arts as a direct participant. I think that really one of the things that got me started was the fact that I was actively involved in music, as the case was, in school. So it's a valuable tool for creating people to be better community citizens.

Raizman: And insofar as Basic Curriculum or a General Education continues to be a requirement for a degree at almost every university or college, the interest in "creating a generalist" remains an ideal of the higher education system. And even though instruction in many arts

curricula tends to become quite specialized and technical, we shouldn't only be concerned with training professional artists. There's going to be a time when you want to do something totally different from what you're doing during the day, when you want to be known as someone else, when you want to immerse yourself in an activity that is relaxing and genuinely recreative. And when you've acquired a couple of these skills, whether it's playing an instrument, viewing art, or making it, it comes in quite handy.

Irwin: Yes, people should take time early in their lives, and not wait until they retire. The more community programs that can be put out where people practically stumble over them as they go about their daily schedules, then the more these kinds of things can happen, and the more it will improve a community. It's just a way of educating citizens to be concerned with their town, to be contributing members of their community.

Raizman: I imagine that's really what being a citizen means.

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

The Western Illinois Regional Studies Association held its ninth annual conference in Peoria on September 19. It was sponsored by the Peoria Historical Society, and the talks related to the theme of entrepreneurship. The conference included a tour of Jubilee College Historic Site, which has been recently restored by the State of Illinois.

The tenth regional studies conference will be held in Quincy next spring, and those who have attended recent Western Illinois Regional Studies Conferences will receive brochures in the mail. Others are invited to inquire with the chairman of the conference planning committee: Louise Crede, Coordinator of Community Services, John Wood Community College, 150 S. 48th St., Quincy, Ill. 62301.

There are annual conferences devoted to the history and literature of Illinois, and for those who may be interested in them and would like to receive future brochures, these are the people to contact. For the Illinois History Symposium: Dr. Roger D. Bridges, Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, Old State Capitol, Springfield, Ill. 62701. For the Illinois Literary Heritage Conference: Ms. Cecilia Velasco, Coordinator, READ ILLINOIS Program, Office of the Secretary of State, State of Illinois Center at Chicago, 100 W. Randolph St., Chicago, Ill. 60601. The history symposium is held each year during the first week-end in December at Springfield; the literary heritage conference is held in October at a different location every year. The next one will be in Chicago.

The long-awaited fourth volume in the *Tales from Two Rivers* series has recently appeared. It is a collection of about ninety memoirs focused primarily on personal experiences in western Illinois early in the century. It includes memoirs in the following subject categories: Small-town Stuff, Encounters with Death, Good Times and Bad Times on the Farm, Old-time Politics, Immigrants, Around Home, Old-time Arts and Culture, School Days, Transportation and Communication, and Special Memories. *Tales from Two Rivers IV* is available through the organization which sponsors the series: Two Rivers Arts Council, College of Fine Arts, Western Illinois University, Macomb, Ill. 61455. The book sells for $15.95. Copies of *Tales from Two Rivers I, II,* and *III* are also available at the same address.

The Illinois Newspaper Project is interested in locating files of the state's newspapers, especially those which have not yet been microfilmed. Anyone who has old newspaper files, or who knows about such files, is encouraged to contact Janice Petterchak, the Project Director, who is Director of the Illinois State Historical Library. Her office is at the Old State Capitol, Springfield, Ill. 62701, and her phone number is 217-782-

4836. The United States Newspaper Program, of which the Illinois Newspaper Project is a part, is funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and coordinated by the Library of Congress.

John E. Hallwas
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REVIEWS OF BOOKS

SUGAR CREEK: LIFE ON THE ILLINOIS PRAIRIE. By John Mack Faragher. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986. Pp. 280.

Local history is finally coming of age. And John Mack Faragher's extensive study of an Illinois farm community, Sugar Creek, is an important addition to the emerging literature of this genre of American history. Faragher, who has published a prize-winning book on family life on the Overland Trail, attempts to show, as all good local history must show, that the part is a reflection of the whole. He maintains that what happened and why it happened in one small part of central Illinois in the forty years before the Civil War was typical of the entire pioneer experience in the upper Midwest. In his reconstruction of family history Faragher shows convincingly that the social dynamics of Sugar Creek — the interaction of the family with the landscape, sexual relations, the community's economic growth from subsistence to commercial agriculture, the persistent stability of kin relationships, for example — all combined to give a picture of a typical frontier locale that could be found anywhere, and hence everywhere, in Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Iowa, and northern Missouri between 1820 and 1870.

There are a number of positive things which stand out in the reading of *Sugar Creek.* The author has a way with words, sometimes. At places he tells the familiar very well indeed. He presents in easy prose the results of his thorough and exhaustive research in census manuscripts, land records, and other archival data. He shows new insights into why pioneers placed themselves where they did on the land (at the "juncture of environments") and brings out the importance of the trivial, such as "moon farming," in their lives. He argues that marriage was more often than not based on the need to create a labor force to run a small farm. Simply understood, reproduction equaled farm production. He points out, for the first time, how frontier intestacy laws worked against allowing daughters ever to have a share of their father's lands. Even though the court might award the girl an equal portion of the estate the women ended up with nothing because the land was forfeited to their husbands when they married; or if they were married at the death of the father, ownership was transferred immediately to their husbands. He details a fascinating story of farm community interdependency in a "borrowing system" of sharing basic tools such as wagons, wheelbarrows, and teams. He convincingly demonstrates that the Sugar Creek practice of "endogamous marriage" or "sibling exchange" kept the land intact in large parcels among the same families. "Members of these families," he observes,

"continued to hold over three-quarters of timber and margin, lands, and better than a third of the newly acquired open prairie . . ." (p. 145). There are other gems. Political alignments and voting patterns, for example, are thoroughly analyzed and explained.

On the other hand, Faragher steps into some potholes. Despite his readable style he sometimes runs to excess and trips over his own rhetorical enthusiasm and overstates the case. "Sugar Creek was a settler society," he wrote, "a minor example of the dynamic and fearful expansion of European civilization." (p. 234). Hardly. Faragher also has a problem with keeping his focus on Sugar Creek; he wanders. He will be writing, for example, on patterns of early family immigration into central Illinois from the upper South when suddenly he tells about the Celts, Angles, Saxons, and Normans. "The history of Sugar Creek," he states in transcendental historiography, "is part of the history of folk migrations . . ." (p.52). Or, when telling about how the settlers of Sugar Creek acquired a warranty deed to their homesteads, he quickly, without warning, digresses into Thomas Jefferson, the Land Act of 1796, and the U.S. Congress. A third weakness is Faragher's penchant for extrapolation. He draws conclusions about Sugar Creek from sources either not germane to that place or time or, worse, totally unrelated to both. For instance, in drawing a picture of religious revivalism, while admitting that nothing survives from Sugar Creek during that period, he just substitutes as a historical source material from the *Missouri Harmony,* a frontier songbook, or quotes from Edgar Lee Masters' *The Sangamon,* a memoir of Illinois farm life after the Civil War.

On balance, however, this work is an indispensable monograph. It ties in the part to the whole (although sometimes this is overdone) and presents new materials on family life on the fringe of civilization. He traces, systematically, the hows and whys behind that community's transition to a mature, commercial farm community of mid-nineteenth century America. It is a must for the shelf of every academic library.

Robert P. Sutton
Western Illinois University

A HISTORY OF ST. PAUL CHURCH, 1857-1986. By Alice A. Krauser, Donald A. O'Harra, Elizabeth Roark, and Mary Lou Torgerson. Macomb, Illinois: St. Paul Church, 1986. Pp. 163. $10.00.

Any journal dealing with western Illinois which omitted mention of this parish history would be strangely incomplete. The committee of four persons spent almost eight years to complete the volume. In fact, St. Paul Catholic Church celebrated its 125th year in 1979.

St. Paul Parish was organized by Father Edward O'Neill in 1854. Mass was celebrated in the home of the Frank McSperritt family, and was

attended by the Patrick McGinnis, Peter Crawford, Patrick Laughlin, Francis Campbell and Michael McGann families. Descendants of some of these families are present parishioners. After three years of celebrating mass in the homes of members and in the old Fourth Ward School on Washington Street, three lots and a house were purchased from Birch and Nancy Maury at the corner of Johnson and W. Jackson streets. The house, built in 1832, was used for divine worship.

In 1867 a wood frame church was built at a cost of $4,000-$5,000 and dedicated on August 11, with Father John Larmer as pastor. This was 10 years before the establishment of the Diocese of Peoria. By 1878, the average Sunday attendance had grown to 80 and the annual income reached approximately $1,000. The present church was dedicated in 1926 by Bishop Edward Dunne of Peoria. Father Richard Pricco has been pastor since 1977.

This history is a tribute to the past, a reminder of our religious heritage. Some 77 black and white photos are of special interest—photos of the cemetery, the parish priests, Franciscan Sisters from Clinton, Iowa, First Communion and Confirmation classes, buildings (rectories, parochial school, St. Francis Hospital, the Newman Center at W.I.U.), financial records, recipes, various organizational officers, plus the Sacred Heart Church buildings at Tennessee. Records of early baptisms, marriages, deaths and officers of parish organizations — incomplete as they are — carry the reader back into the last century.

The diligent research of the authors will prove useful for those tracing genealogies. For this is a social history of pioneers in McDonough County: Irish, German, Italian and others who arrived later. The persistent faith of these people in the midst of many hardships is a challenge to contemporary citizens. Often even getting to church over ice or knee-deep mud became an all-day trek. References are made to St. Rose Church in Rushville, St. Bernard Church in Bushnell, and Immaculate Conception Church in Carthage. In 1907 Father Michael Ryan became pastor and served the parish until his death in 1942. His 35 years are the longest term of service. The idiosyncracies of this priest and the others make interesting reading. The association of Father John George Alleman, O. P. and the Mormons at Nauvoo is treated in passing. The names of 61 Franciscan Sisters who served — often heroically — are included in the extensive index of names. There are, for example, 52 Sullivans listed! Up-to-date lists of officers of various organizations are included: Knights of Columbus, Home & School, Parish Council and Women's Guild. Serving the Peoria Diocese since its inception in 1877 have been Bishops John Lancaster Spalding, Edmund M. Dunne, Joseph H. Schlarman, William E. Cousins, John B. Franz, and the present Edward W. O'Rourke. Separate chapters deal with the Third Order of St. Francis, religious vocations, war and peace, liturgical changes and music.

Unfortunately, there are some typographical errors to be noted, but otherwise, the book is a credit to the authors. O'Harra is a newspaperman

and Torgerson is a writer. Krauser and Roark are long-time members of St. Paul's, who helped assemble the information from county histories and records, early newspapers, and letters and diaries of present and former parishoners.

Rev. Richard E. Trutter, O.P.
St. Rose Catholic Church
Rushville, Illinois

EPISODES OF A FARM BOY. By Carl C. Lewis. Edited by Jerrilee Cain-Tyson and Victor Hicken. Macomb: College of Fine Arts, Western Illinois University, 1986. $10.

Episodes of a Farm Boy is a very readable volume of memoirs by a man who was raised in rural Adams County, near Camp Point, and who evidently forgot very little about his early years.

Lewis did not write about his life because he was an important man, but rather, because so much of the world he knew as a boy has passed away. In that way, he shares the motivation of many senior citizens, who have lived through decades of very significant cultural change. Surely they must sometimes look back over it all in amazement, as he does toward the end of his book:

> Good heavens! Is it at all possible that I lived in the time of Theodore Roosevelt, Albert Einstein, Woodrow Wilson, Red Grange, Charles Lindbergh, Franklin Roosevelt, Jesse Owen, and a score of equally significant people? Did I really go through the times of Arizona and New Mexico completing the 48 states, World War I, the Great Depression, World War II, the Korean War, the Viet Nam War, the assassinations of a dozen world figures, and a revolution in morals and mortality? I did, and I am amazed at the whole trip. (p).

Of course, he does not deal with great world events, but with the everyday matters of farm and family life decades ago. There are sections on such common things as "Butchering Day," "Fences," and "The Grain Harvest," and there are some more distinctive chapters. One of the more interesting ones is devoted to "Building the Round Barn," which explains how those rare and remarkable farm structures were made. Another one, "How My College Degree Has Made Manure Hauling Such an Inspiration," is a humorous episode about a kind of learning that didn't come through his agriculture course at the University of Illinois. There is a good deal in the book about horses, which reminds us that Lewis is part of the last generation in the modern world to be dependent upon the horse — and to have a widespread affection for horses.

The book has little unity, except that the experiences reflect rural life. But Lewis does manage to impress the reader with the importance of

family relationships, which is a welcome emphasis at a time when the American family is undergoing significant change. As he says toward the end of the book, "Life is best lived in the bosom of family and all that it implies: love of brothers and sisters; the affection of one generation for another; the rites of passage as years go by; Christmas times with sons, daughters, nieces and nephews, uncles, aunts, and cousins; births and burials; and memories."

The book demands comparison with the *Tales from Two Rivers* volumes which have appeared in recent years. In fact, the physical item itself even resembles one of the volumes in that series. The Lewis book has more photographs — many more — than the *Tales* books, but they are neither as clear nor as fascinating as the public has seen in the memoir collections. Moreover, Lewis writes in a matter-of-fact style, and while he is always readable, his book lacks the emotional impact of the *Tales* volumes that feature a variety of shorter memoirs.

That being said, *Episodes of a Farm Boy* will be welcome reading for anyone with an interest in personal recollections of regional life decades ago. Beyond that, the book could well serve as a model format for others who would like to produce a book-length memoir.

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